

“You can only interpret that which you are able to perceive”: Demonstrating critical reflexivity in ICT4D work

by

Kirstin Krauss

Department of Information Systems, Rhodes University, South Africa, k.krauss@ru.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This paper argues the importance of critical reflexivity in emancipatory Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) work. By drawing from ethnographic encounters in a traditional rural community in South Africa, the author demonstrates how reflexivity became central to understanding that which underpinned collisions and conflicts in the social phenomena. The use of the catchphrase, “you can only interpret that which you are able to perceive”, is an attempt to initiate self-reflexivity also in the reader, and to subsequently challenge researcher-practitioners to critique tradition and the assumptions that they often subconsciously make about their own position and role in ICT4D discourses and practice. While demonstrating the reflexivity that helped the researcher uncover, interpret and articulate key collisions from social phenomena, the paper also reflects on some criteria for critical research, the researcher’s value position, collisions between different views of reality (or value conflicts), and the value of starting out inductively. The paper concludes by showing how Bourdieu’s critical lineage was retrospectively applied to help articulate key findings.

Keywords: Reflexivity, Critical Ethnography, Bourdieu, South Africa

1 INTRODUCTION

During my ethnographic encounters and immersion in an Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) project in a traditional Zulu community in a deep rural part of South Africa (SA), there were certain facets of the social phenomena which I was simply unable to interpret or explain during the becoming-a-member phases. Although I was guided by key cultural interpreters with regard to the “what” and “how” of respectful and appropriate community engagement, the underlying values and views of reality that guided local logic and sense-making eluded me until well into my second year of fieldwork. What I *did* experience during those phases, though, was frustration, conflict, confusion, apparent

gross inabilities, struggles in intercultural “whats” and “hows”, and even insecurities in how to deal with people. It was only through an ongoing process of critical reflexivity that I was able to identify, interpret and eventually articulate that which underpinned the new social reality I became part of. It was while I reflected on the reasons for fieldwork collisions and value conflicts that I realised that “you can only interpret that which you are able to perceive”. That understanding became the motivation for this paper, in which I will attempt to demonstrate only some aspects of the reflexive process that led me to discover reasons for value conflicts and the collisions between different views of reality I observed in the social phenomena I engaged with.

During this process of reflection, two sets of readings guided me. The first comprised readings on critical ethnography, but specifically Hammersley (1992) who argued that the meaning of emancipation or the improvement of a situation should always be seen in the light of the values that one accepts. The second related to Bourdieu’s critical lineage. Throughout his work, Bourdieu argues that social scientists are potentially also caught up in a field structured by forces in terms of which they struggle and strategize to improve their positions (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998; Mahar, Harker and Wilkes, 1990; Postone, LiPuma, Calhoun, 1993). He subsequently advocates for a reflexive social science that also looks at the extent to which the investigator and theorist is implicated in mechanisms that promote repression (Bourdieu, 1977; Howcroft and Trauth, 2005). From this I concluded that I would not be able to understand how local people view development, emancipation or any type of improvement of a social situation if I did not deeply identify with and live their values. I also realised that my own limitations and social entrapment (Thomas, 1993) might hinder my ability to perceive that which underpins others’ views, meanings, and beliefs (i.e., worldview), and if I could not perceive it I would not be able to interpret it.

In the following section I present some background on ICT4D and specifically how ICT4D discourses may potentially create and maintain repression, false consciousness, and social entrapment. Thereafter I provide a brief background on the project and my role as ethnographer. My subsequent discussions comprise summaries of criteria for critical research, the importance of taking a value position, some reflections on collisions between different views of reality (value conflicts), the role of starting out inductively, and how Bourdieu’s critical lineage was retrospectively applied to help articulate key findings.

2 BACKGROUND ON ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Although literature shows that ICT has the potential to contribute to the socio-economic development and quality of life of developing communities in SA, it also draws attention to several difficulties associated with ICT4D research and practice. A notable debate among ICT4D researchers is that IS theories, strategies and technologies established in developed countries cannot necessarily be transferred to developing contexts and that the assumptions about their applicability and associated approaches should be questioned (Avgerou and Walsham, 2000; Heeks, 2005; Lee, Jang, Ko, and Heeks, 2008; Thompson, 2008; Avgerou, 2009; Zheng, 2009). Literature also expresses doubts about the value of ICT and ICT4D implementation in the first place (Avgerou, 2009). Lewis (1994) and Avgerou and Walsham (2000) for example, show that new technologies can cause damage to the fabric of local communities outweighing any economic advantages to be gained, while Roode (1993) argues that the detrimental consequences of the introduction of ICTs in societies should be anticipated to avoid further dehumanisation of people. He holds that “n[ot] all societies can absorb information technology without harmful side-effects such as loss of privacy, unemployment, computer crimes, technostress and similar woes.” (Roode, 1993:2).

In the context of deep rural and Afrocentric communities in SA, openness to alternate and contradictory meanings attributed to development and development concepts seems to come into play. This includes for example the need to understand differences and collisions between the African and Western worldviews and associated value systems (Willoughby, 1928; Asante, 1983; Ndegwa, 1992; Myers and Avison, 2002; Thompson, 2004), assumptions about power relations and position in intercultural communication and development discourses (Asante, 1983; Avgerou, 2005; Kvasny and Keil, 2006; Thompson, 2008), tension caused by suffering such as sickness, poverty and hopelessness (Lewis, 1994), the cultural-context of developing communities (Kvasny and Keil, 2006; Krauss, 2009) and the ways in which developing communities innovate and function (Ali and Bailur, 2007; Avgerou, 2009; Krauss, 2009). These concerns show that there is a need for practice-orientated research that not only solves practical problems in a specific social setting but that will also forge genuinely practical and locally orientated guidelines that respect and reflect local practice, values, knowledge and protocol, that are emancipatory and transformative, and that could inform policy, practice and ICT4D research methodology (Hammersley, 1992; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001; Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; De Vos et al. 2007; Thompson and Walsham, 2010; Myers and Klein, 2011).

ICT4D discourses, of which some have been mentioned above, appear to emerge from, as well as sensitise one to, a potential non-understanding of the situation and the manner in which ICT is supposed to enable development. These discourses also draw attention to a non-understanding of the motives, assumptions and expectations that drive the implementation of developmental ICT. They increase awareness of potential contradictions and conflicts between the different assumptions, values, views and cultural systems of the “developed” and “developing”, and consequently collisions between differing views on how the ICT4D artefact should be introduced, valued or understood.

In ICT4D literature, several such potential conflicts have been highlighted. Zheng (2009), for example, questions the simplistic link between ICT and economic growth, as well as the connection between ICT and human well-being. Heeks (2005) highlights concerns associated with technocratic assumptions and universal modernist development criteria. Thompson (2008) argues for the need to critique “unqualified ‘technological optimism’” (p. 822), mentioning international players such as Cisco and Microsoft, who may see developmental ICT as a potential for market expansion, and who may exert motives that are not entirely altruistic. Thompson also highlights conflicts of interests between the different role-players involved in policy formulation and practical implementation of ICT4D and the need to question the relevance of “hard” or Western approaches (and their embedded assumptions and values) to developmental ICT.

All of these can be seen as forms of false ideologies and false beliefs that are potentially deeply entrenched in the worldviews of both the “developed” and “developing”. It is a problem in need of critique. Those promoting or believing such views are essentially in need of emancipation and enlightenment. One may even argue that the term “development” is a discriminatory concept or a repressive ideology enforced onto developing countries by developed societies (Escobar, 1992; Lewis, 1994; Heeks, 2005). In such cases a false consciousness may manifest in the assumption that you are “developed” and that those you are “helping” or researching are in need of development, that it is inherently better to be “developed”, and that you know how to develop others. This is a repression-sustaining belief; one that keeps people in a state of non-emancipation and non-enlightenment, and which needs to be challenged.

Literature puts forward the idea of cultural entrapment which according to Thomas (1993) points to the variety of mechanisms, emanating from one’s own worldview, that are applied

to assure social harmony and conformity to interactional norms, organisational rules, institutional patterns and ideological concepts (Berger and Luckmann, 1967 in Thomas, 1993) and which may affect assumptions about development and development discourses. Cultural entrapment may be accompanied by ethnocentrism which refers to the tendency of most people to think of their own culture as the best or most sensible (Harvey and Myers, 2002). In ICT4D endeavours for example, the outsider-researcher (often Western-minded) may view their own mind-set, culture and artefacts (such as ICT) as superior (Escobar, 1992), and may subconsciously insist on transferring this belief during ICT4D endeavours. This type of false consciousness may ultimately lead to ICT4D failures. The implications of cultural entrapment and false consciousness embedded in ICT4D research and practice, therefore, needs to be critiqued.

In understanding oppression and emancipatory interests, one needs to acknowledge the contradictions in what people say about their needs and interests, what desires are genuine and whether a person's desires are possibly against their own interests and coherent "good life" (Hammersley, 1992). There might therefore, be a conflict between needs and interests (Myers and Avison, 2002), with several reconstructions of reality, such as that participants might regurgitate what they have been told by outsiders about the "good life", about what well-being, enlightenment, deprivation and oppression means, or that their honest emancipatory interests might work against their personal well-being (Zheng, 2009). As critical theorist one should be open to the possibility that one might define the "real interests" of the oppressed group incorrectly (Hammersley, 1992). When considering this, the idea of emancipation is problematic. The meaning of emancipation, enlightenment and improvement might always present some disagreement (Hammersley, 1992). As highlighted before, emancipation or the improvement of a situation should always be viewed in the light of currently accepted values, while recognising that our understanding of such values might continue to change or be challenged through ongoing self-reflexivity.

3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Because of the realities of doing ICT4D work in rural and traditional communities, I have in my research endeavours opted for an approach that is practically relevant, theoretically sound and ethically sensitive to the need for change and empowerment. Critical ethnography and participant-observation as a fieldwork strategy allowed me to embed myself in ICT4D practice in such a way that I could seek out deeper meaning from social phenomena and empower people in a sustainable manner. This type of embedding implies a position of

enquiry that not only questions underlying assumptions, expectations and motives that drive ICT4D phenomena, but also an approach for discovering the emancipatory practices and the real interests of the research participants with whom I engaged. As critical ethnographer, I specifically focussed on contradictions, conflict and collisions in the social phenomena as well as those conditions that cause oppression or deprivation. I sought to participate in developmental work that addresses change and emancipation in all ICT4D stakeholders.

Due to the limitations in length of this paper, I will not delve into methodology, the specific context and detailed examples, or discuss how the themes and lessons emerged from fieldwork. The reader could, however, consider engaging some of the benchmark publications from which I drew understanding on the methodology of ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988; Whyte, 1996; Schultze, 2000; Harvey and Myers, 2002; De Vos et al., 2007), critical ethnography (Hammersley, 1992, Thomas, 1993; Myers, 1997; Myers, 2009), and critical social theory (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997; Adam, 2001; Čečez-Kecmanović, 2001; Harvey and Myers, 2002; Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; McGrath, 2005; Kvasny and Richardson, 2006; Kvasny and Keil, 2006; Myers and Klein, 2011).

4 PROJECT CONTEXT AND ETHNOGRAPHIC IMMERSION

The research reported here evolved from my ethnographic immersion in a community engagement and ICT training project, entitled *The Happy Valley* (a pseudonym) *Project*, in a deep rural part of SA. As ICT4D practitioner, my role has been that of the primary driver and “outsider” champion of the Happy Valley Project. Since 2008 I have been involved in many aspects of community engagement and ICT4D that have evolved since the inception of the project. This involvement includes being part of how the Happy Valley Project started and gained momentum, how relationships with teachers and key community members developed and matured, how key community members were empowered through ICT and train-the-trainer initiatives, how the ICT training slowly progressed towards becoming sustainable and community owned, how project stakeholders were empowered and delivered from false consciousness and cultural entrapment, how I was inspired through relationships with the community and from living among the people for periods of time, and how I learnt to approach ICT4D research and practice ethically.

From an ICT4D project management point of view, I presided over activities such as preparing project proposals, acquiring international funding, implementing ICT training

initiatives, empowering development agents, project reporting and feedback on ICT policy, and after implementation service and support of community gatekeepers and development agents. My role in the project evolved from being a doer of ICT work and training to someone who was consulted for guidance, quality control and certification. As a result, relationships in the project were focussed on those participants who functioned within a caregiving, visionary or entrepreneurship role in the community.

Ethnographically my position evolved from community entry, to becoming a member and to being recognised as a member of a community of development agents and caregivers in Happy Valley. Throughout this process, I was intrinsically embedded in the social phenomena that were investigated, that is, I became the data, lived the data (Whyte, 1996) and was collaboratively part of data collection, interpretation and analysis.

5 SEEKING CRITERIA FOR CRITICAL RESEARCH

During the process of writing-up results I had to often pause and revisit the ontological and epistemological assumptions that guided fieldwork as well as the process of interpretation and analysis of data. In doing so I made an effort to address questions such as: How did critical social theory manifest in fieldwork (or how did ontology and epistemology guide fieldwork)?; How did critical social theory manifest during interpretation and analysis?; How did the data themes that emerged align with key critical themes or foci?; How did my research align with the mandate of the critical theorist?; and, Could I possibly use core concepts from a prominent critical theorist (e.g., Habermas, Foucault or Bourdieu) to retrospectively reflect on my findings? During this reflection process I reverted to guidelines or criteria for critical research that I obtained from a number of key sources on critical research in IS.

The first was Klein and Myers' (1999) set of principles for interpretive research. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) and Myers and Klein (2011) argue that critique cannot be separated from insight. Therefore, as suggested by McGrath (2005) and Myers and Klein (2011), I addressed the element of gaining insight using mostly Klein and Myers' (1999) set of principles for interpretive research.

I furthermore compiled a "lens" or framework for identifying criticality in social phenomena (see Appendix A). This framework was based on what constitutes evidence of critical work according to the prominent sources on critical theory I read. I compiled this list also because sources on critical hermeneutics and critical ethnography (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993;

Myers, 1997; Harvey and Myers, 2002; Myers, 2009) suggest that data treatment involves seeking out contradictions, oppositions, tensions, and conflicts in the social situation. This lens proved especially useful for reminding me about the ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical theory and helped me to identify moments of criticality within myself, my fieldwork and the data.

Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) five key themes or foci for shaping a critical epistemology, provided a further useful framework for confirming my approaches and epistemology. Their five themes overlap considerably with what I have presented in Appendix A. Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) first theme, which is **emancipation**, is a thread running through all the different critical streams. According to them, emancipation implies a commitment to freeing individuals from power relations around which social and organisational life are woven, and that keep people in a state of repression. It is a central objective of critical research. The intention is to focus on "the oppositions, conflicts and contradictions in contemporary society, and to be emancipatory in that it should help to eliminate the causes of alienation and domination" (Myers and Avison, 2002:7). Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) second theme is the **critique of tradition**. The aim is to disrupt the status quo rather than simply reproducing it. That is, critical researchers question and disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions inherent in the status quo, and assume the perspective of wider social, political, historical, economic and ideological contexts. The third theme is **non-performative intent**. This theme implies a rejection of a view of action that is guided only by economic efficiency (i.e., the production of maximum output for minimum input) as opposed to a concern for social relations and all that is associated with it (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005). The fourth theme is about the **critique of technological determinism**. It challenges "discourse surrounding socio-economic change ... which assumes that technological development is autonomous and that societal development is determined by the technology" (Bijker 1995, cited in Howcroft and Trauth, 2005:4). "C[c]ritical literature seeks to conceptualize technology development, adoption and use within the context of broader social and economic changes." (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005:4). The fifth theme is **reflexivity**, which highlights a uniqueness or methodological distinction between critical and other research traditions. Critical reflexivity provides reflections on the role of the researcher as a producer of knowledge and the mediations and negotiations that are associated with this role, and specifically the extent to which the researcher is implicated in the mechanisms that promotes repression in the social phenomena.

I found Myers and Klein's (2011) set of principles for critical research (see Appendix B) the most summative, addressing most of the themes from Howcroft and Trauth (2005) and that which I had summarised in Appendix A. However, since Myers and Klein (2011) published their paper after I completed most of my fieldwork, I applied their set of principles as a framework to retrospectively gauge to which degree I have succeeded in addressing the necessary aspects of critical work (as demonstrated in the next section). While doing so, I remained mindful that Myers and Klein (2011) noted that the mandate of critical research cannot be captured by a fixed set of principles, that their principles should not be viewed as canons to limit the kinds of research that IS researchers may conduct, and that their principles should not be used in a mechanistic manner but rather with judgement and discretion on whether, how and which of the principles should be used in a given project (Myers and Klein, 2011).

6 TAKING A VALUE POSITION

In my ethnographic work I took a value position (Thomas, 1993, and Principle 2 from Myers and Klein, 2011) regarding the careless and disruptive infusion of ICT into the social dynamics of the developing community (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993), and the importance of negotiating the implications of existing repressive ideologies, beliefs, and practices evident in those perceived to participate in the ICT4D artefact. I equate ethical research and practice to a critical position of enquiry (also see Krauss, 2009). This taking of a value position is what guided me in applying the other principles from Myers and Klein (2011) and others.

I argue that ethical ICT4D research and practice implies that introducing the ICT4D artefact should involve a deep and careful critical reflexivity (see Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) fifth theme) on the part of the researcher in order to challenge the researcher as outsider's own cultural entrapment and ethnocentrism (Principle 3) that might have emanated from an assumed position of power, enlightenment and view of reality (note historicity and prejudice from Klein and Myers (1999)). I consequently argue that ethical research and practice should commence with a critical position of enquiry where the researcher challenges his/her own assumptions, beliefs, practices, and conscious or subconscious perceptions about power, position and enlightenment regarding what is understood as emancipation, empowerment and true upliftment. Only then can the researcher begin to understand meaning from within the lifeworld, assumptions and social context of the local people, and begin to perceive and interpret that which might keep people in a state of repression, non-emancipation and non-

enlightenment (Principle 4). In this sense, the researcher should be part of the social phenomena and a participator in self-emancipation (Principle 4). The questioning of the researcher's own beliefs, assumptions and practices is, therefore, a precursor for ethical (read critical) research and practice. This challenging of my own preconceptions, assumptions, ethnocentrism and cultural entrapment (Principles 3 and Howcroft and Trauth's (2005) fifth theme) was most prominent during the community entry and enculturation phases of ethnographic work. It was during these phases that I was most challenged with regard to my own self-emancipation (Principle 4).

As I was able to immerse myself in the social phenomena and assume the beliefs, values and realities of the people I engaged with, I started to perceive and to understand their lifeworld (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997). I had to unchain myself from my own assumptions and create new ones that aligned with the meanings of my informants (Thomas, 1993). Only then, after this ethical position had been achieved, could I find a balance between the two worlds, that is, resist repressions from both and embrace emancipatory practices of both worlds. I therefore also argue that ethical research and practice implies a deliberate process of understanding reality and meaning from within the lifeworld of the local people (Thomas, 1993; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997). Only when meaning is understood in this manner, will the critical theorist be able build on and progress to doing emancipatory ICT4D. That is, ethical research and practice occurs when the researcher can internalise reasons (experiential knowledge) for differences, diversity and both worlds' practices, beliefs and values. Then such research and practice lay the foundations for emancipation and transformation, and the challenging of repression-sustaining situations, false consciousness or cultural entrapment evident in the social phenomena. In line with this reasoning and in context of this study, I argue that ethics implies working inductively and not enforcing a theoretical lens upfront onto the social phenomena; since using a theoretical lens in this manner may limit the researcher's ability to see alternative explanations and therefore alternate views of reality (Kvasny and Keil, 2006).

Ethical research also implies practice-orientated research that is relevant to the emancipatory interests of the local people. To state this in another way; critical research should first be emancipatory (Principle 4), and in addition, it should be relevant to the practical reality of the social situation in which it is practiced (Principle 5).

7 DOING RESEARCH INDUCTIVELY

Aligning myself with the basic assumptions of the critical research perspectives, I went into the field and engaged with the social phenomena. Fieldwork commenced as I simply spent time with the people from Happy Valley and participated in what the ICT4D project and social phenomena led me to do. During the community entry and enculturation phases (August 2008 to June 2009) several key issues inductively emerged to me. When I started to participate more actively in the ICT4D artefact (becoming-a-member phases: July 2009 to March 2010), I was able to initiate and explore a number of relationships with key community members and cultural interpreters. During this time my understanding evolved from lessons that were mostly about “what to do” in ICT4D and ICT training to developing a greater sense of “how” and “why” things are done in certain ways (i.e., understanding what underpins how and why people weave logic in particular ways). I developed a greater maturity of understanding of the key issues that I identified during the enculturation phases.

I noted that as I engaged with people and asked them questions about what I observed and learned, that the “what to do” was quite clear in their minds and most of them were able to articulate the explicit side of things as guidelines to me. For example, when we discussed the issue of community entry and introducing ICT4D, they would all tell me things such as: “engage with community leaders”, and “show respect to people”. However, fewer of my informants were able to articulate “how” to engage with a community leader or “how” to show respect, that is, articulate tacit cultural knowledge and nuances. Showing respect in my culture, for example, involved different cultural mannerisms and I could only learn new ways of showing respect through observation and sometimes asking questions. Answers to these types of questions required deeper scrutiny and engagement with people who could articulate contrasts.

The issue of “why”, that is, explaining underlying cultural values and principles of the social grouping, was even more difficult and subconsciously embedded in the knowledge and practices of local people (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993). For example, as I learnt about respect and gaining access to people, I noted from their stories and ways, the importance of friendships and hospitality approaches. No-one actually articulated this specific concept as such during the becoming-a-member phases. It was, therefore, observer-identified. Knowledge of this theme helped me explain collisions in the social phenomena. As I matured in the field I was building networks of friendships using hospitality approaches,

that is, showing and responding to hospitality. Hospitality approaches emerged as a key cultural exchange rate.

By the time the being-a-member phases (April 2010) started, I had not only a good sense of my research topic, but also a better understanding of the key issues (collisions) that emerged from the social phenomena, as well as the values, assumptions and social realities of the local people. My understanding and experiences of the collisions and contrasts made it easier for me to understand and articulate my understanding of social practices and therefore bridge the gap between theoretical objective understanding and embodied practical knowledge of the social phenomena, which I later learnt is central to Bourdieu's critical lineage (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993). I observed my role and position in the field and my subsequent mannerisms to be more intuitive and spontaneous than during the enculturation phases. In Bourdieu's terminology, I had learnt to participate in and assume the habitus of the local people through socialisation (Mahar, Harker and Wilkes, 1990). I had learned to play the game of social interaction (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993) and position myself, with particular social and symbolic capital, where I could affect emancipation and change ethically. I could therefore more easily theorise deeper meaning and "why" issues. I had transcended the gap between theory and practiced reality, and had internalised practice.

My follow-up data collection, therefore, focused on achieving a more detailed understanding of the key issues I had identified. Critical reflexivity turned into gaining insight during those phases, that is, the element of criticality helped me to identify the issues (Klein and Myers, 1999), and the element of insight helped me to seek out deeper meaning regarding those issues (see Appendix B). Findings during this time did not reveal new macro-level themes, but rather more intricate details and nuances about the themes, such as stories of confirmation, clarification and innovative ways of implementation.

8 DIFFERENT VIEWS OF REALITY AND VALUE CONFLICTS

As critical ethnographer, one of my key experiences regarding relevant data was that it emerged to me much tighter and sooner (Thomas, 1993) than I had expected. As I learnt lessons about "why" things are and why collisions occurred in the social phenomena, one particular theme stood out. I construe this theme as *the collisions between the typical task-orientated or performance-orientated value system of western-minded societies and the traditional loyalty-based value system or people-orientated culture of the Zulu people* (or in short I will refer to it as – value conflicts). I could almost explain all other aspects of

fieldwork and manifestations of conflicts, collisions, repressions, and emancipatory practices in the context of this theme. This theme also allowed me to articulate differences in meaning attributed to emancipation and emancipatory concepts. An understanding of this collision affected the way I did fieldwork, my understanding of community entry and gaining access to people, the way I approached ICT training activities, my understanding of the tensions I observed in development agents involved in ICT4D, and even transformations within myself. It related to the fact that different social groups have “different experiences, histories, dispositions, cultural needs, desires and tastes” and that these difference are not always treated as equal (Kvasny and Keil, 2006:31,32). This collision consequently has implications for the ways in which ICT4D is viewed, valued, evaluated, and expected to contribute to development.

This primary collision needs detailed explanation though, including what it entails; how my understanding thereof evolved; how it emerged from and affected fieldwork and data analysis (including evidence obtained from the data); the role of criticality in understanding this theme; how such understanding affected the meaning of emancipation, emancipatory concepts, and repression; how an understanding of this collision allowed me to challenge cultural entrapment and ethnocentrism on both sides of the “development divide”; and how this collision had to be negotiated in order to align with the value position I had taken in order to achieve emancipation and change. Due to limitations in length, I will briefly demonstrate my reflections on only some of these issues in the following sections.

9 REFLECTIONS ON VALUE CONFLICTS

The Western worldview, which is predominantly associated with productivity and task-orientatedness, typically dictates the expectations and assumptions of Western or developed societies in SA and abroad. It is also the case that Western task-orientated values and assumptions are embedded in international ICT policy and other drivers of development. Since ICT is predominantly a Western invention developed in context of Western values and thinking, one finds this Western logic is embedded in ICT4D.

The traditional African worldview on the other hand is predominantly people-centred or loyalty-based. This means that typically things are valued and evaluated according to people-orientated or loyalty-based principles. In a people-orientated culture, identity and self-respect is associated with loyalty rather than performance or productivity like in Western societies. Value judgements are people-orientated and loyalty-based. Where the Westerner typically

assesses the ICT4D artefact according to productivity-based measures, the African community assesses the ICT4D artefact according to a people-orientated value system. Consequently developmental initiatives are rejected or accepted by traditional communities according to loyalty-based or people-orientated criteria and value judgements. As emancipation or the improvement of a situation is viewed in the light of the values that people accept (Hammersley, 1992), differing value systems implies differences in value judgements regarding the meaning of emancipation and other development concepts.

The reality is that there is a collision between people-orientatedness as a value system in SA and the task-orientatedness evident in industrialised and westernised contexts. Although this analysis is quite broad and general, and needs more detailed scrutiny, it has implications for the way in which quality and success of development initiatives are perceived and assessed, as well as the way in which development is practiced and researched. One of the strengths of task-orientated Western societies is that they are productive in terms of the task. The weakness, however, is that task-orientatedness can be disruptive, especially of relationships and the values that keep traditional communities socially intact. The African worldview on the other hand is sensitive of relationships and naturally people-centred. The downside, however, is that traditional communities are less productive in terms of the task.

If one takes the example of ICT training in Afrocentric communities, learning about ICT involves a cultural transition. Also, in a training situation, success relies heavily on incorporating people-orientated approaches in teaching. Students may for example associate achievement more strongly with not disappointing the trainer than with mastering content. A student may find it difficult to learn new concepts or construct knowledge outside of a personal relationship where he or she is not able to give and receive loyalty and hospitality. Because of the nature of community orientated living, it also becomes important for a group in a training situation to see each other achieve. They would say things like “we don’t want anybody to fall behind”, or “we want everyone to be successful”. Although this might be a safe place to be, such approaches may be counterproductive to some.

In a people-orientated context, cultural exchange rates and reciprocity are strongly related to hospitality and friendship. People and traditional loyalty are placed above task completion, precision or productivity. Showing and giving hospitality becomes central to portraying respect and self-respect, and is therefore central to introducing and sustaining the ICT4D

artefact. Even the concept of time and completion is associated with a deep consideration of each other, rather than a specific time stamp.

The collisions highlighted above reveal some of the real difficulties associated with planning and doing ICT4D projects in deep rural communities. Innovation and sustainability for example may imply something different in a people-orientated value system. A task is only viewed as completed if there is a mutual sense of completion and if everyone has had the chance to succeed and achieve. Although this cultural mannerism is highly considerate of people and relationships, it has implications for task-orientated measures such as budgets, timeframes and specific project objectives – which may make strategic ICT4D project planning quite difficult, if not impossible. When incorporating people-orientatedness as part of ICT4D project outcomes, one should also consider things such as motivation, trust and acceptance, respect, inspiration, community entry, power relationships, hospitality, and so forth. During my ethnographic work, one of the research participants actually noted that measures such as budgets, objectives, timeframes and service agreements are there to “eliminate the unpredictability of the human factor”. In traditional people-orientated cultures, however, the unpredictability of the human factor is embraced, accepted and encouraged. This has been observed to be a considerable source of collisions in collaborative ICT4D work. Interestingly, this openness to people and their “unpredictability” provides some practical confirmation of what Ali and Bailur (2007) suggest in their paper on the sustainability challenge where they argue that unexpected consequences of ICT4D implementation should be taken as the norm and resultant improvisations should be embraced as bricolage and “tinkering” rather than as a threat to sustainability.

These collisions or differences also have implications for research practice and fieldwork. For example, culturally sensitive community entry principles should be a central concern in successful ICT4D research; research participants should not be seen as subjects but rather as partners and friends; study objectives should include gaining trust, acceptance, and reciprocity, while hospitality approaches are key principles and indicators for success and acceptance.

Different groups weave the logic of ethics differently. In a traditional community, ethics is deeply associated with showing respect and hospitality, and not necessarily with concepts like privacy, plagiarism, and so forth. But how to show respect implies conflict. In the different worldview of the Happy Valley people, respect and sincerity is shown often by

withholding opinion. As a result, the local people often experience internal conflicts, which they are unable to articulate when engaging in development discourses and practice. On the one side, according to their worldview, they are courteous and respectful, and as a result do not push for their ways, views and opinions to be noted or observed. Because of this conflict, and their cultural practice of always showing hospitality, they may find it difficult or impossible to refuse participation, or to articulate how and when they disagree with the way development is construed by outsiders (see Thompson, 2008). On the other hand, according to the Western mind-set, people tend to offer opinions as a way of expressing pro-activeness, strategic task-orientatedness, and even self-respect. It is often viewed as necessary for survival in a productivity-driven world. These differing assumptions on how to participate in a discourse may result in a dysfunctional relationship, where one party simply offers ideas, strategies and approaches because of their worldview, and while the other party withholds opinion as a way of showing self-respect and hospitality.

My observation is that in such situations, the local people will react in one of two ways. The more traditional person, who is more embedded in cultural ways (like the people of Happy Valley), will observe the outsider as disrespectful and ignorant, and will then simply withdraw; they will not take ownership or accept an outsider initiative if that outsider has not properly engaged the people at their level and in their ways. The outsider will find it quite frustrating not getting feedback or response from the locals, and may criticise them because of their lack of interest or “inability” to see task possibilities and the assumed values associated with their approaches. Another way in which people may react is by simply accepting and therefore attempting to align with everything an outsider offers them. It translates into a situation of conflict where worldview (values, beliefs) and approach do not align, and then simply fail. I observed this collision to manifest subconsciously within people, and as a result most are unable to articulate it. Generally only those who have been able to unchain themselves from their own ethnocentrism and who have been able to live both worldviews are able to articulate reasons for these collisions and frustrations.

The examples and views presented above are very brief and due to limitations in paper length I cannot also include illustrative data from fieldwork activities. However, it is my contention that because of the cultural entrapment and ethnocentrism of ICT4D stakeholders and a consequent non-understanding of each other's worldviews, miscommunication (mis-meaning) occurs, contributing to the failure of many ICT4D artefacts in traditional communities. When the ICT4D artefact is planned and evaluated using ethnocentric

approaches, it is doomed to failure. However, when ICT4D stakeholders are emancipated regarding each other's worldviews and value judgements, the strength of diversity comes into play and an ICT4D artefact that reflects diverse values, expectations and assumptions becomes a sustainable option.

In my ethnographic work, I developed partnerships with development agents and cultural interpreters in the community of Happy Valley. These individuals are typically those who are already in a position of agency in the community (e.g., teachers, nurses, community leaders, social workers, etc.) and are thus able to assist in cultural bridging and implementation of the ICT4D artefact. The value of working with them is that they understand both the African and Western worldviews and are therefore able to either negotiate or articulate contrasts and collisions to the outsider-researcher. It was my experience that in introducing the ICT4D artefact, one should aim to identify cultural interpreters and community visionaries that will be able to receive and understand new technologies in context, and who can then advise the "suppliers" (outsiders) of these technologies on the implementation thereof in their communities. These cultural interpreters will then be able to interpret the technology and its potential for their own people (Krauss, 2009). The outsider should be open to this.

10 HOW BOURDIEU'S CRITICAL LINEAGE HELP ME RETROSPECTIVELY REFLECT ON FINDINGS

Myers and Klein's (2011) principles one and six (Appendix B) needs some clarification at this stage, that is, using core concepts from critical theorists and improving social theories.

Although I believe it is possible to apply key concepts from other critical theorists, it was Bourdieu's critical lineage that appealed most to my approach and findings. His work developed primarily from ethnographic field studies (Bourdieu, 1977; Myers and Klein, 2011) and aligns well with the nature of typical ethnographic findings (e.g., Barnard, 1990; Schultze, 2000; Levina, 2005). An explicit aim of Bourdieu's critical lineage is to understand reasons why certain social groups have remained in repression (Kvansy and Keil, 2006; Myers and Klein, 2011). "The Bourdieu lineage gives emphasis to asymmetric distribution of symbolic and social assets in society, which then cause and reproduce (i.e., maintain) discriminatory social stratification between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'" (Myers and Klein, 2011:21). I found it to align well with the value position I have taken.

Barnard (1990) shows that Bourdieu's work specifically helps the ethnographer to address questions around interpretation and representation, such as; "what is the position of the

researcher in relation to the objects of the research?”, and “w[W]hat questions of power arise out of the constituting discourses that constitute ethnography?” (Barnard, 1990:71). Bourdieu addresses these issues by advocating a theory of scientific practice that challenges both those that practice social life without reflecting on it, and those that reflect on social life without practicing it (Nice in Bourdieu, 1977; Barnard, 1990).

Looking back at the themes that I construed inductively (i.e., primarily without a theoretical lens), I have noted many similarities between my observations on that which maintains repression in the social phenomena and how Kvasny and Keil (2006), using Bourdieu’s views on power and culture (or read *Habitus* according to Bourdieu’s terminology), argued:

“E[e]very society has some form of educational institutions that serve to reproduce and legitimize dominant culture values. This process of cultural reproduction inevitably entails a form of power, which Bourdieu (1993) refers to as symbolic power. This is power exercised through hegemony of norms and techniques for shaping the mind and body without the use of physical force or laws. The ‘have nots’ are identified and then persuaded to defer to educational institutions that will enable them to partake in the cultural practices such as online banking and electronic commerce that are privileged by more dominant agents. However, social groups have different experiences, histories, dispositions, cultural needs, desires and tastes (i.e. habitus), but these differences are not treated as equal. The dominant agents are better positioned to define their cultural arbitrary as superior to that of the working classes, and thereby to naturalize their superiority through symbolic power. Educational institutions serve as sites that provide everyone with a chance to be co-opted into the groups possessing symbolic power.” (Kvasny and Keil, 2006:31,32).

Central to Bourdieu’s work is the power of symbolic systems and their domination in the construction of reality (Bourdieu, 1977; Mahar, Harker and Wilkes, 1990), even to the point of dominating others’ conceptions of good taste and beauty. As described in the previous sections, the different worldviews of people and the accompanying conflict in values translate into a situation where people make assumptions about their own position, knowledge and power in a development discourse. This dysfunctional relationship is based on the ability of people to participate in ICT4D discourses or play the social [read developmental] game (Postone, LiPuma, Calhoun, 1993). ICT and assumed knowledge about how to participate in

the ICT4D artefact becomes a source of symbolic and social capital that people use to dictate assumptions, enforce worldviews, evaluated development, and so forth.

Bourdieu advocates for a “reflexive science of society” (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993:3). He argues that both the scientist and the participator who analyse and describe culture may misrecognise social reality (Hammersley, 1992; Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993; also see Howcroft and Trauth, 2005). Bourdieu argued that a theory of cultural practice could only be developed if the analyst “were able to transcend inherent oppositions and dichotomies and the limitations of vision they always entail” (Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993:2). In his construction of a reflexive approach to social life, Bourdieu put forward three key concepts, namely habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998; Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990; Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993; Kvasny and Keil, 2006), which I will not fully define in this paper, except for the following brief outline.

My observations regarding the different habitus (read cultures) of the “haves” and the “have-nots”, the subsequent collisions regarding assumptions about power and position in the ICT4D phenomena (or field) emanating from the different habitus, and therefore struggles and strategies (forces) for various forms of capital in the field (of forces) (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998; Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990; Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun, 1993; Kvasny and Keil, 2006) made me opt for Bourdieu’s lineage. Forces in the field may be the assumptions people make about the meaning of development, based on the evidence they have construed from their own social entrapment. These forces (manifesting as struggles and strategies for various forms of capital) have evolved from false consciousness and afford people with more (Western) symbolic and cultural capital to be viewed (consciously or subconsciously) as holding a superior position in development discourses. I argue that these perceptions evolve primarily from different values or “different experiences, histories, dispositions, cultural needs, desires and tastes” that are not treated as equal (Kvasny and Keil, 2006:31,32). For example, I may construct the meaning of emancipation, repression, development and associated concepts in the light of my own ethnocentricity and that which I value. Consequently I consider “the others”, or “the developing” as deprived, because I see practices and realities that align with values which I do not understand within the context of my own entrapment.

My approach of maximum immersion allowed me to practice ICT4D according to the values and tastes of the local culture. In Bourdieu’s terminology I participated in a process of

improvisation that is structured by cultural orientations, personal trajectories (subjectivity), and an emerging ability to play the game of social interaction (Postone, LiPuma, Calhoun, 1993). Since I had learnt to resist the repressions of both worlds and assume the emancipatory practices of both, my efforts resulted in emancipation and change. Diversity became a new form of richness which I brought to ICT4D discourses – which in this sense means a rich understanding of all the different worldviews that form part of ICT4D phenomena.

11 SUMMARY

Those telling stories about Africa often have an ethnocentric and critically-distant view of that alternate reality, conveying a message of false consciousness, unproductivity, inability, and the like. At the same time they often have a supercilious sympathy for those living in simplicity. The real African voice, however, may not separate feeling from concepts – and African voices, although most deeply embedded in their own reality, do not necessarily possess the right capital to articulate and play the game of social interaction along the expected lines of reasoning that the more powerful have established.

As a critical theorist and someone who considers myself an integral part of the social phenomena I have experienced, I consider subjectivity to be a strength of my work. My findings thus illustrate how I identified with the people of Happy Valley and their silent plight. I therefore present reason accompanied by a level of sentiment, and maybe I display some frustration as well. The truth of the matter, though, is that theory enabled me to conduct research using my heart as well as my mind.

I conclude: There is a different way and an alternate set of values by which people weave the logic of freedom, identity, and emancipation, and although it may be counterproductive in terms of the task, one cannot take it away from those who value it, simply because it doesn't make sense to an outsider. The ICT4D researcher must rather emancipate him- or herself from entrapment, through critical reflexivity and by actually living the values of the people.

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APPENDIX A – A LENS FOR CRITICALITY IN SOCIAL PHENOMENA

<i>Criticality concept or principle</i>	<i>Sourced from</i>
To seek out and expose deep-seated structural contradictions and disagreements within social phenomena	Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991); Thomas (1993); Myers (1997); Myers and Avison, (2002); Myers and Klein (2011)
To acknowledge (and seek to understand) that contradictions in social systems may lead to inequalities and conflicts	Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991); Thomas (1993); Myers (1997); Myers and Klein (2011)
To seek out and address unequal positions of power between the haves and have-nots, and within discourses between the haves and have-nots	Čečez-Kecmanović (2001); McGrath (2005); Kvasny and Keil (2006); Myers and Klein (2011)
To seek out (and understand) emancipation and emancipatory interests of people as precursor for change and improvement	Hammersley (1992); Ngwenyama and Lee (1997); Myers and Klein (2011)
To seek out and clarify ethics; discharging of social and ethical responsibilities	Thomas (1993); Myers and Klein (2011)
To be explicit about values and value judgments, as well as alternate and contradictory value judgments (e.g., critique of western values), and how they affect the meaning of criticality and emancipation	Hammersley (1992); Thomas (1993); Myers and Klein (2011)
To critique the meaning of emancipation and emancipatory concepts	Hammersley (1992); Ngwenyama and Lee (1997)
Taking a critical stance towards taken-for-granted assumptions, prevailing beliefs, social practices and values regarding the ICT4D artefact	Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991); Neuman (1997); Myers and Klein (2011)
Reflexivity: reflections on the role of the researcher as a producer of knowledge and the mediations and negotiations that are associated with this role	Howcroft and Trauth (2005)
Knowledge is embedded in social and historical practices	Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991); Myers (1997); Myers and Klein (2011)

Addressing alienating and restrictive social conditions, false ideologies, false consciousness, cultural entrapment, ethnocentrism	Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991); Thomas (1993); Ngwenyama and Lee (1997); Myers and Klein (2011)
Acknowledging and negotiating the role of prejudice and foreknowledge, making explicit philosophical prejudices, juxtaposition of cultural prejudices	Klein and Myers (1999); Schultze (2000); Myers (2009); Myers and Klein (2011)
Evidence of devising ways to gain access to deeper meaning and conflicting and contradicting accounts in the social phenomena, validity or rightness of what is being communicated, facilitating inter-cultural communication	Thomas (1993); Ngwenyama and Lee (1997); Čečez-Kecmanović, (2001); Myers (2009); Myers and Klein (2011)
Relevance to practice; improving practice	Harvey and Myers (2002); McGrath (2005); Myers and Klein (2011)
To seek change and transformation in societies	Ngwenyama and Lee (1997); Alvesson and Deetz (2000); Myers and Klein (2011)
Suggestions and improvements for social theories and practice	Hammersley (1992); Thomas (1993); Myers and Klein (2011)

APPENDIX B – A SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR CRITICAL RESEARCH IN IS (FROM MYERS AND KLEIN, 2011:25)

The Element of Insight
<i>Refer to Klein and Myers' (1999) set of principles for Interpretive research</i>
The Element of Critique
1. The principle of using core concepts from critical social theorists This principle suggests that critical researchers should organize their data collection and analysis around core concepts and ideas from one or more critical theorists.
2. The principle of taking a value position Critical theorists advocate values such as open democracy, equal opportunity, or discursive ethics. These values drive or provide the basis for principles 4 through 6.
3. The principle of revealing and challenging prevailing beliefs and social practices This principle suggests that critical researchers should identify important beliefs and social practices and challenge them with potentially conflicting arguments and evidence.
The Element of Transformation
4. The principle of individual emancipation

Alvesson and Wilmott (1992) say that all critical social theory is oriented toward facilitating the realization of human needs and potential, critical self-reflection, and associated self-transformation.

5. The principle of improvements in society

This principle suggests that improvements in society are possible. The goal is not just to reveal the current forms of domination, but to suggest how unwarranted uses of power might be overcome (although the critical theorist should not assume any special position of authority). Most critical theorists assume that social improvements are possible, although to very differing degrees.

6. The principle of improvements in social theories

All critical theorists believe that our theories are fallible and that improvements in social theories are possible. Critical researchers entertain the possibility of competing truth claims arising from alternative theoretical categories, which can guide critical researchers in their analyses and interventions.